

Real Foods that Heal
Weekly bulletin, volume 3, #4
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Cherries

In his excellent book, *Eat, Drink, and Be Healthy*, Dr. Walter Willett (one of the world's leading experts on food and health and a professor at the Harvard School of Public Health) reminds us that a key to good health throughout the lifespan is a large quantity and variety of vegetables and fruit, with an emphasis on a color palate. His categories are: dark green leafy vegetables, yellow or orange fruits and vegetables (remember the cantaloupe from last week?), red vegetables and fruits, legumes (beans), and citrus fruits. This week, *Real Foods that Heal* focuses on one of those red foods, the cherry.

I am especially grateful that cherries are such a health promoting food, because our organic food buying club here at home just received a case of delicious dark sweet cherries this week. They will not last long at my house. Soon a bowl full of pits will be the only evidence they were here.

Besides the exceptional flavor of this fresh summer treat, why get excited about cherries? Cherries, like other red vegetables and fruits, are loaded with phytonutrients called anthocyanins. According to some sources, cherries have the highest anthocyanin concentration of any fruit. They are also high in polyphenolic compounds which raise their antioxidant capacity. Researchers have found that those antioxidants are most concentrated in the skin of the cherry, so if you are ever tempted (in a moment of insanity) to peel the little things, eat the skin and throw the fruit away ☺.

You have read a number of times in this bulletin how antioxidants like those found in cherries are an important preventive strategy for cancer. There was also some very encouraging research from the University of Michigan presented in 2007 which found that (in animal studies) a diet high in cherries decreased the tendency to metabolic syndrome. This means that the cherries made it easier for the body to normalize levels of blood sugar, decreased cholesterol levels, and decreased inflammation. These are very important findings considering the rapid rise in the number of Americans with the metabolic syndrome, strongly correlated with increasing body weight. For perspective however, please understand that I am not suggesting that if you are overweight with a tendency toward high blood sugar and cholesterol that you simply eat more cherries! They would be a part of a healthy overall plan of change. For reference, a cup of sweet cherries with the pits is less than 90 calories; if you chose instead the cherry ice cream, that's about 250 calories and lots of saturated fat.

One word of caution about cherries: conventionally grown cherries are in the top 10 (#7 on the list) of highest loaded produce items with pesticides. So if you can find them, and afford them, I recommend that the organically grown cherries are worth the price you pay. (See the Environmental Working Group's list of pesticides in produce at <http://www.foodnews.org/>).

I hope that this short bulletin gives you a reason to get excited about cherries! I also hope there are some left downstairs in the kitchen! See you next week.

Sweet dark cherries

My serving suggestion this week is simple and avoids the temptation to complicate the process of eating cherries. Forget the pies or cobblers, don't even bother to try to remove the pits and add them to a fruit salad. Just buy a bagful, rinse them in a colander, and put a bowl out in the kitchen where you and your family can enjoy these fresh summer treats instead of reaching for a packaged sweet food. And one more thing: put an empty bowl nearby to hold the pits! Enjoy!

To your health,

Robert Pendergrast, M.D.

www.realfoodsthatheal.com

P.S. You know 5 people who deserve to know how to reduce their disease risk by food choices. Please forward this e-mail to them by using the link below.

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